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Old Fort

361 DUSTY, WINDY LANES BORDERED WITH ROWS OF squat wooden houses, wide paved streets lined on each side with paintless one-story frame structures, the smells of river, fishboats, fertilizer plants and escaping gases, and overshadowing all, the gigantic gas reservoirs. That is the impression given by the Negro section of the Old Fort, located in the extreme northeastern section of Savannah. 682 Here life goes on serenely for days, months. Then suddenly, 754 as it happened only a short time ago on a calm Sunday morning, a woman is stabbed in the back and left writhing on the pavement to die before a swiftly gathering crowd. It was whispered among the frightened spectators that the death was caused by conjure, for despite all efforts to remove the knife it remained firmly embedded in the victim's back.

363 The streets present a monotonous aspect because of the absence of grass and trees. Yet the pedestrian is frequently 361 surprised to come upon a dead-end alley blocked by an old brick tenement house with lovely arched windows or to find gay flowers in boxes and tin cans on some of the low stoops. On several corners the houses abruptly give way to small grocery stores or beer parlors.

368 There are two Baptist churches and one Sanctified church in the Negro part of the Old Fort. Although the people 771 are devout believers in all the tenets of the Christian faith, many of them, particularly the old ones, are bound by older beliefs and superstitions. There exists among them a deep-

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*Yamacraw**

YAMACRAW TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE LITTLE INdian town that Tomochichi, chief and friend of General Oglethorpe, established on the Savannah River bluff west of the township of Savannah over two hundred years ago. Today waterfront industries have pushed the Negro district southward from the bluff, but it is still so close to the river that some of the small shanties rattle when winds roar across the water.

In this community the residents are drawn largely from coastal counties of Georgia and South Carolina. At one time an unruly element gained Yamacraw the reputation of being the toughest section of Savannah, but the presence of an unusual number of churches of various denominations seems to have improved law and order in recent years. Intense religious interest is aided by pride felt in the fact that the first Negro Baptist church in America was established here and also that Methodism gained an earlier start among Yamacraw Negroes than in any other part of the county.

In spite of the difference in religious doctrines there seem to be certain common beliefs handed down in families. We found an implicit and readily asserted faith in the power "tuh do unnatchul ting." Ghosts are everyday experiences. Root doctors are in constant demand.

* *Old Yamacraw has gone. Since late in 1939 there has been a radical physical change under the program of the Federal Housing Administration. Two thirds of the tumble-down brick houses and wooden shanties in the once crowded area have been replaced by modern concrete buildings with low rentals for Negro tenants.*

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Springfield

ROWS OF FADED GREY HOUSES, HUDDLED CLOSE TOgether and facing on narrow dirt lanes, house the population of Springfield, a Negro community lying west of Savannah near the city waterworks. In the neighborhood are several wooden churches of various denominations, a well constructed modern brick school building, and a number of stores that supply the six hundred odd Negroes of the community.

Many of the houses are shuttered, dim and quiet. So somber an atmosphere prevails that it is easy to imagine the spectral figures that the Negroes claim they see wandering at night along the twisting pathways. It is not surprising to be told of the sinister powers which are constantly at work and against which many inhabitants of this locality are always on guard.

A familiar figure in the neighborhood is James Washington,* famed locally as a fortune teller and root doctor. It is said that Washington's patronage is growing steadily; [22a, c, 48] each day new clients visit his dilapidated house, seeking advice or perhaps a cure for some puzzling ailment that has descended upon them.

The consulting room is smoky, airless, and reeking with a queer pungent odor. The shades are drawn down tightly, and when a visitor is being given advice the door is shut securely against intrusion. The furniture is scant, consisting of a lamp on a plain table, a couch for the visitor, and placed directly across the room a wooden armchair in which sits the dealer in magic. The most remarkable object in the room is

* *James Washington, Springfield.*

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Brownville

BROWNVILLE, MORE PROSPEROUS OF ASPECT THAN the Negro communities usually fringing business and industry, spreads westward along the edge of Savannah. Though on its Currytown boundary it, too, contains the inevitable shacks in lanes, several of its streets, paved and tree shaded, are lined with good frame and brick houses which are occupied by the more well-to-do Negroes, among them teachers, doctors, lawyers, and business men. A substantial school building and the Charity Hospital speak of advanced social consciousness.

On Bismark Street is found the House of Prayer, one of the many churches established throughout the country by Bishop Grace. Here several times each year the leader visits his congregation, and the day on which "Daddy Grace" * [16] returns to his flock is always a gala occasion. Regular members and visitors from outlying districts crowd the heavy lumber benches of the House of Prayer. The air is tense with excitement. Above the confusion can be heard the strident but rhythmic beat of drums.[23] Bright splashes of color are given by the crepe paper decorations and the vividly contrasting military costumes of members of the church organizations, among which are the Lilies of the Valley, the Queens, the Royal Guards, the Silver Leaf Band, the Transportation Committee, Male Ushers No. 1, Male Ushers No. 2, and the Sons and Daughters of the Prophet. Others in the

* *Though the meetings of Bishop Grace are common to many parts of the United States, it was thought well to include an accurate description of the House of Prayer as it was found in this community.*

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White Bluff

HUGE, MOSS-HUNG OAKS FORM A CANOPY AND CAST filigreed shadows upon the White Bluff Road, which passes directly through the quiet Negro community of White Bluff, eight miles southeast of Savannah.

Winding roads turn from the main highway and terminate in the various sections which form the settlement and which are known as Nicholsonboro, Rose Dhu, Twin Hill, and Cedar Grove. The sections east of the White Bluff Road are on the Vernon River. It is here that many of the inhabitants make their living by catching crab and fish which they sell in the city markets. West of the highway the narrow roads lead through thickly wooded areas of great beauty. Along these roads families have cleared small tracts and built their homes, reserving garden space for flowers and vegetables. In the summer wild crepe myrtle trees, with blossoms as luscious a red as the heart of the watermelon, contrast colorfully with the bright blue paint on the doors and trimmings of some of the houses.

The White Bluff Road, which for two miles forms the main street of the community, passes the houses of other residents set well back from the road. Most of them are small and unpretentious but well kept. At intervals of perhaps half a mile are three rural grocery stores; farther along is a whitewashed church with red and blue glass windows, and at the farthest extremity of the settlement is a similar but larger church.

The inhabitants, of which there are approximately four

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Pin Point

PIN POINT, A NEGRO COMMUNITY ABOUT NINE MILES southeast of Savannah, is scattered over some twenty or thirty acres on a peninsula overlooking Shipyard Creek. Many of the small wooden cabins are neatly whitewashed and are half hidden by shrubbery and spreading oaks. Flowers and vegetables are planted in the most advantageous sunny spots near the houses, and most of the yards are enclosed by picket fences, giving a cozy and pleasant privacy. The lanes, little more than wagon tracks, twist in and out and across the settlement. The informal and haphazard scattering of the houses, with high shrubbery bordering the lanes, gives an effect that is pleasing and unusual.

Pin Point has a church, a pavilion on the tidewater creek, and a crab cannery. The men and women who do not work as domestic servants at the nearby country places find employment in the crab cannery or fish and crab and shrimp for themselves. The life is quiet, soothed by the smell of the salt marsh.

It is only when some great excitement takes place, a stirring religious service, a dance at the community pavilion, a death,[37b, c] or some scandal concerning a neighbor, that quiet Pin Point bestirs itself. Recently, one of the fishermen ventured into the foreign waters of the Ogeechee about ten miles distant and there he was almost devoured by an alligator. All that was left of him, "the ham," was given a burial[2] amid the loud lamentations of his relatives and neighbors.

The people are, almost without exception, black or dark

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Darien

THE NEGROES OF THE DARIEN SECTION, MANY OF whom live in small scattered communities outside the town, are proud of their Darien ancestry. When the younger people migrate to larger communities, it is a common thing to hear them say proudly, "My people come frum Darien."

One of the most typical settlements is opposite the Todd Grant Negro School. A few houses are clustered about the knoll facing the school building, and more dilapidated board shacks are scattered over the little hill. At the top is Aunty Jane Lewis' cabin, surrounded by small sheds and fenced patches of ground where chickens and a goat are kept from wandering too far. At the north a few cypress trees straggle off to the wood. A sturdy bush provides the sunny drying ground for the gourds that later will be used as water dippers.

Aunty Jane * claims that she is one hundred and fifteen years old, and to see the small bent woman with the deeply lined black skin and filmy eyes is to believe her claim. Her voice is high pitched, with the thin timbre of extreme age, but she still moves with sudden agile gestures. During our conversation she hopped up from the steps and began to do the Buzzard Lope [17] to illustrate her story.

"I belong tuh Robert Toodle wut lib in Nawt Calina an he sole me down yuh wen Ise twenty-one. I ain membuh much bout Nawt Calina but uh membuhs plenty bout duh ole days yuh, cuz I bin yuh neah bout a hunnud yeahs. I be-

* *Jane Lewis, Darien.*

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Sapelo Island

131 SAPELO ISLAND IS ONE OF THE CHAIN OF "GOLDEN Isles" lying along the Georgia Coast. The word Sapelo was
103 derived from "Zapala," the name used by the Indians when the island was a favorite hunting ground for the tribes that had given up much of the mainland to the Spaniards and
172 later to the English. Among the landmarks that recall colorful historical episodes are Indian mounds, tabby ruins of colonial days, and the remains of a house built by Jean Berard Mocquet, Marquis de Montalet, a French Royalist who immigrated to Georgia from Santo Domingo about 1797.

000 Plantation life flourished on Sapelo in the early nineteenth century. Here Thomas Spalding conducted one of the most extensive agricultural enterprises in the coastal section. The "big house" on the south end of the island was a spacious tabby mansion, so strongly constructed that the original walls are still standing and form the nucleus of the present dwelling. The island, with the exception of a number of Negro homesteads, is now the property of Richard Reynolds of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but, although many improvements and changes have been made, much of the atmosphere of the early days has been preserved.

464 Industrial activity is concentrated in the central portion of Sapelo, where there is a sawmill that gives employment to many of the islanders. Nearby are the company houses, a
•368 post office, and a store. Several Negro churches and a dance hall are located elsewhere on the island.

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491 to give way to a growth of towering oaks; then it joined
137 again, resuming its winding trail through the quiet, shadowed countryside.

361 The little settlement now known as Harrington was formerly the property of the Demere family. A little less than a mile north of this settlement was Harrington Hall, home of Raymond Demere, who came to this country with Oglethorpe after serving ten years under Lord Harrington at Gibraltar.

• 368 To the left of the road was a small unpainted store operated by Ryna Johnson's daughter with whom she lived. Various advertisements on the front of the small building gave splashes of color to the green of trees and foliage.

342 Set back from the store was Ryna's house, surrounded by an expanse of short grass upon which a horse was grazing. The house was weathered with age, as were the vertical boards of the fence that enclosed the garden; here and there in the fence a new unpainted board, regardless of length, had replaced an old, and the top presented an irregular, jagged pattern. The cabin was the usual two-room affair but with a hall through the center and a lean-to in the back. The walls
353 were papered with newspapers and, although there was a
352 motley collection of objects and furniture, everything was scrupulously clean.

115 Ryna * was blind from cataracts and had not been feeling
[164] very well; so she had just got up from bed. Although her body was bent and very feeble, her mind was still clear.

"Ise bout eighty-five yeahs ole, but I caahn tell zackly. I belong tuh duh Coupers wen I wuk on duh plantation. It bin sech a long time I mos stop studyin bout dem days. But I membuh we use tuh hab good times."

829 In answer to our inquiry regarding any Africans whom she had known during plantation days, Ryna told us, "Alexanduh, Jummy, an William, dey is all African. I membuh ole William well an he tell me lots bout times in Africa. Dey

* *Ryna Johnson, Harrington, St. Simons Island.*

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middle of a sandy cotton field, with cabins on each side in a row." The first building on the street was the Praise House, a paintless, cheerless-appearing building of boards that "looked as if a heavy gale might lay it low." Some antebellum Praise Houses were equipped with a bell (not to be confused with the driver's horn). Several nights during the week, as well as on Sundays, its welcoming, soothing sound brought the people on "the street" together for assembly. The following description, although a post-Civil War one, could easily fit the antebellum scene:

> . . . soon dark figures moved along those countless little footpaths that intersect the plantation in all directions.
>
> The Praise House filled slowly. It was a small one-roomed cabin that looked weirdly alive as you approached it through the darkness. The numerous cracks in roof and walls gave the outlines of the building sketched in streaks of light against the background of the night.
>
> The room was filled with rough backless benches, and at one end was a little table for the leader. Behind this stood a long bench where several men, officers of the Praise House sat facing the people in motionless silence with half-closed eyes and bowed heads.[1]

Most planters erected these meetinghouses after 1840 to afford the slaves a place for worship and to deprive the inhabitants of various plantations of an opportunity to mingle. Yet the Praise House also offered Gullahs a means to free expression. It was not only a place for religious gathering and spiritual solace but was essential to their community structure. At the Praise House, among fellow slaves, Gullahs publicly professed what they considered a satisfactory spiritual experience, as it was necessary to obtain approval from the Praise House congregation before petitioning the master and the Baptist church for membership. If the religious experience was not inspiring enough, or if the elders and the membership doubted the candidate's sincerity, the individual was not recommended for baptism.[2]

In addition to being a means of bringing conformity and spiritual harmony to the slave quarters, the Praise House was very much like a town hall where members of the plantation gathered, using prayer, song, and exhortation to comfort each other. J. Miller McKim, a Northern observer very much interested in Gullah music, wrote in 1862:

> I asked one of these blacks . . . (Prince Rivers, Sergeant, 1st Reg. S.C.V.)—where they got these songs. "Dey make 'em, sah." "How do they make them?" After a pause, evidently casting about for an explanation, he said: "I'll tell you,

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it's dis way. My master call me up, and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it, and is sorry for me. When dey come to de praise-meeting dat night dey sing about it."[3]

The slaves' loyalty was to the Praise House rather than to the Baptist church few of them ever attended. Even during Northern occupation and after the Civil War, Gullahs continued to gather at the Praise House whenever trouble befell their community. Despite the fact that white Baptist churches were almost completely under black control during the war (in terms of both structure and organization), the source of power on the plantations was still the Praise House. And after the war, Gullahs continued to see it as the center of group life and to conduct themselves according to Praise House customs and regulations.[4]

Since the Praise House congregation consisted of families who knew, through daily contact, the personal life of a candidate, it was possible to scrutinize behavior and to ostracize an individual, not so much on purely religious grounds as for breaches of trust within the quarters. Elders and members exerted great disciplinary power over plantation hands, having the right to "turn dem outen de Pray's House if dey ain't fur walk right." Hence, while the Gullahs probably attached little significance to church disciplinary measures instituted by the master, but which they, as Praise House members, were forced to implement, a crime against one of their own was a different matter. Long after slavery, the Praise House continued effectively to hold its members responsible for good behavior, and the influence of these small units of the church has long been credited for the fact that crimes were rarely committed among Gullahs. In the 1920s the Beaufort sheriff stated that the Praise Houses kept Gullahs law-abiding even as freedpeople, "because the Negro fears the Lord more than he fears the law." Yet it was not "fear" so much as a desire for harmony and a sense of love and respect for each other that allowed Gullahs to maintain integrity in the community. The significance of Praise House loyalty and community membership as a social regulating force has been observed by researchers as late as the 1970s.[5] Existence of these plantation meetinghouses conformed to the desires of slaveholders, but they also served to strengthen bonds of kinship and a sense of commonwealth among the Gullahs.

Gullahs often expressed time in terms of before or after they "had sense." The concept puzzled Northern teachers who worked among them during the Civil War. "Catching sense," as the Gullahs called it, a term still used today on some Sea Islands, refers to the time when a person

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15. Berlin, *Freedom: Black Military Experience*, 54–55; Higginson, *Army Life*, 63, 72, 86–105, 149–50; H. G. Spaulding, "Under the Palmetto," *Continental Monthly* 4 (August, 1963): 202–3; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 64, 87–93.

16. Higginson, *Army Life*, 46–48, 70–71, 240–41; Spaulding, "Under the Palmetto," 196.

17. Allen Diary, 82–83; Pearson, *Port Royal*, 99, n. 1, 102, 114, 181–82; Charles Nordhoff, "The Freedmen of South Carolina," in Frank Moore, ed., *Papers of the Day* (New York: C. T. Evans, 1863), 4–5; Towne Diary, 14, 21; Botume, *Amongst the Contrabands*, 143–56.

18. Forten, "Sea Islands, Part I, 588.

19. Rupert Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1912), 26.

20. Higginson, *Army Life*, 192; Tilden G. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Atheneum, 1970; repr. from 1968 ed.) 257–60.

21. Botume, *Amongst the Contrabands*, 204; Forten, "Sea Islands," Part II, 672; Allen Diary, 164.

22. Botume, *Amongst the Contrabands*, 204.

23. Higginson, *Army Life*, 208.

24. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm*, 257–60 For an enlightening and provoking treatment of "romantic racialism" see George M. Frederickson, *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), Chapter 4; William Francis Allen, Charles P. Ware, and Lucy M. Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951; repr. from 1867 ed.), 48; Higginson, *Army Life*, 208–9.

25. Rev. Mansfied French to Revs, Whipple and Jocelyn, n. d., AMA.

26. Higginson, *Army Life*, 235.

27. Ibid., 71, 236–38, and his Appendix D, 267–76.

28. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 457.

9. *Folk Religion in the Slave Quarters*

1. Mrs. William R. Wister, "Recollections of a Southern Plantation and School," Penn School Papers, vol. 5, 19, SHC; Rosa B. Cooley, *School Acres*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 148–49; Diary of Laura M. Towne, 52, Penn School Papers, SHC; "The Long Look," 2–3, undated sketch of a former slave, Sam Polite, who lived to be over 100 years old, Penn School Papers, vol. 1, SHC.

2. *Minutes, Beaufort Baptist Church*, November 11, 1840 and January 7, 1842, 12; October 7, 1859, 271–74, BC; James H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller* (New York: Sheldon Co., 1879), 104–5.

3. Cooley, *School Acres*, 148–49; Towne Diary, 52, Samuel Lawton, "The Religious Life of Coastal and Sea Island Negroes," (Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1939), 61, 69–72; William F. Allen et al., *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951; repr. from 1867 ed.) xviii.

4. Thomas J. Woofter, *Black Yeomanry* (New York: Henry Hold, 1930), 243–54; Towne Diary 26, 42; Charlotte Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands," Part II, *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June, 1864): 672; Edward L. Pierce, "The Negroes at Port Royal, S. C.," Doc. 51 in *Rebellion Record*, ed. Frank Moore, Suppl. 1 (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1871) 305; Lawton, "Religious Life," 54–57, 60–62; Patricia Guthrie, "Catching Sense: The Meaning

491 one-lane affairs, which pass through woods of oak and pine
and marshes filled with cat tails. The church itself is an
346 impressive structure, built by the cooperative labor of the
461 men many years ago, each of whom hauled an allotment of con-
496 crete blocks from the boat landing in ox carts over the
493 deeply rutted sand roads. It was built in a location equally
368 distant from the "four corners" which were populated at that
time, and faces due east. Preceding the major morning ser-
794 mon, three Sunday-school classes are held simultaneously in
the church sanctuary, with oral reading and discussion of a
printed lesson a major component of the lessons for all age
796 groups. Formal preaching is held one Sunday each month, with
[793 morning and evening services conducted by a well-educated
[794 minister who comes from Georgetown. On other Sundays, ser-
vices are conducted by church members. The most prestigious
794 social group on the island is that of the Board of Deacons
571 of the church; this small group of six or seven of the oldest
men conducts the major business of the island. Other busi-
595 ness is conducted by two women's clubs or "lodges," which
often meet on Sunday afternoons in the abandoned schoolhouse.
Other social activities are parties, adult education classes,
527 music and dancing, and story telling. Community parties
873 are sometimes held in the old school building, and adult
education classes have been conducted there as well. Music
533 is a highly valued activity in every age group, as evidenced
535 both by the singing for Sunday services and by the dancing